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SUBJECT: BLACK DAY OF TERRORISM: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES,
JULY 4 TO 10

¶1. Summary: The Egyptian media roundly condemned the murder of Egyptian envoy to Iraq Ehab Al-Sharif and the London bombings. "Black Day of Terrorism" was one leading newspaper's headline. All media outlets covered remarks by the Mufti of the Republic labeling Al-Sharif's killers as "thugs" who "now face the wrath of God." While some commentators blamed U.S. policy for the violence in Iraq with one former Egyptian ambassador even alleging that Israel and the U.S. were behind his abduction - other commentators directed their wrath toward those who killed Al-Sharif and "distort" the image of Islam. Much of the commentary about the London bombings took place in the context of remarks about Al-Sharif's murder. The media reported on a recent spate of poisoned watermelon cases, reportedly from pesticide use, with some commentators singling out the former Minister of Agriculture for blame. End summary.

¶2. Egyptian envoy to Iraq murdered - coverage: "Black Day of Terrorism" was the banner headline on July 8 in leading pro-government daily Al-Ahram (circulation: 750,000), which featured extensive coverage of the murder of Ehab Al-Sharif, Egyptian envoy to Iraq. The July 8 headline of pro-government Al-Akhbar (circulation: 800,000) read "Religious Crime: Zarqawi's Group Kills Egyptian Ambassador to Iraq." All pro-government newspapers quoted the Mufti of the Republic Ali Gomaa saying on July 7, "It's a crime and the Ambassador is a martyr." The following day, during Gomaa's Friday sermon broadcast live on Egyptian TV, the Mufti said that Al-Sharif's killers were "thugs" who "now face the wrath of God, who will strike them down!" Independent, anti-American weekly Al-Osboa (circulation: 50,000) led with the headline "They Killed Him!" in its July 10 edition. Opposition Al-Wafd (circulation: 70,000) printed on July 10 a front-page cartoon showing an Egyptian woman in white being bit on the hand by a dog from a village labeled "Iraq" under the title "Assassination of the Egyptian Ambassador in Iraq." Egyptian TV's Channel One changed its regularly scheduled programming on July 8 and 9 and, instead, aired "Al-Irhabi" ("The Terrorist"), a film produced in the 90s at the height of Gamaa Islamabad violence in Egypt. (Note: The film portrays an Egyptian terrorist involved in the murder of innocent tourists, showing how he and his colleagues are brainwashed and misunderstand Islamic Sharia law. When the terrorist is injured, a kind Christian physician treats him and soon, the terrorist repents and leaves his terrorist cell. For this, his former colleagues kill him. End note.)

¶3. Egyptian envoy to Iraq murdered commentary: A former Egyptian ambassador appeared on the popular TV program Al-Bayt Baytak ("Make Yourself at Home") on July 10 arguing that the U.S. "convinced" the GOE to send an ambassador to Iraq and that the GOE was "totally responsible" for Al-Sharif's death. Al-Ahram's new Editor-in-chief, Osama Saraya, mourned Al-Sharif's death in a July 9 commentary, remarking that the "crime" would not prevent Egypt from supporting Iraq. However, echoing an all-too-familiar refrain in the Egyptian press, Saraya reiterated that "the Americans are responsible for the uncontrollable violence in Iraq," concluding that the U.S. war on terror "has only increased terrorist crimes worldwide." Former pro-government Akhbar Al-Youn (circulation: 1,000,000) Editor-in-chief Ibrahim Saeda denounced Al-Sharif's murder on July 9, avoiding assigning any blame in his commentary and argued that Egypt should lead the way for other Arab countries by appointing another ambassador. Another former Egyptian ambassador -- Ahmad Al-Ghamrawi, former ambassador to Afghanistan -- alleged to IslamOnline.net and Egyptian TV that Al-Sharif "was kidnapped by a foreign body to pit the Egyptians and Iraqis against one another," suggesting the Israeli Mossad and the CIA as suspects. Liberal columnist Abdallah Abdel Salam, writing in Al-Ahram on July 9, criticized "those who do not adopt a clear-cut position on terrorism and claim that the West is launching a crusade against 'Arabs' and Muslims," emphasizing that terrorism must be condemned "loud and clear and anyone who excuses it is an accomplice to the crime."

¶4. London terror attacks: "A New September 11 in London" was the headline on Al-Wafd's July 8 front page. The former Editor-in-chief of pro-government Al-Gomhouriya (circulation: 500,000) condemned the London bombings in a

July 8 column, yet another columnist writing in the paper that day condemned the U.S. for "the spread of terrorism." The bombings were widely condemned in other pro-government newspaper commentaries on July 9, with one Al-Ahram commentator writing that "Muslim preachers who adopt lame excuses for the London bombings distort the image of Islam abroad far more than terrorism itself." The bombings were mentioned and condemned on the weekend's talks shows, but in the context of a discussion about the murder of Egyptian envoy to Iraq Al-Sharif.

15. Poisoned watermelons: The independent print media continued to report on cases of pesticide-tainted watermelons on the market. The Ministry of Health had announced to the media last week that just over 300 cases of watermelon poisonings had been reported. The Minister of Agriculture, interviewed by Al-independent daily Masry Al-Youm (circulation: 20,000), blamed his predecessor for allowing dangerous pesticides on the market. Meanwhile, on July 10 the Editor of Al-Osboa, which profiled poisoning cases on its front page the previous week, appeared on Egyptian satellite Dream TV to accuse the former Minister of Agriculture of "poisoning Egyptians."

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